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cca news



**Rights with dignity:
Working together for a better future**

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Renewing hope for dignity



The year 2007 will be commemorated as a monumental year in the history of CCA.

It marked the golden jubilee celebrations with member churches and friends from the ecumenical community gathered in Parapat, Indonesia. It was a time for celebration, deliberation and reflection on the course of the Asian ecumenical journey.

As we present this last issue of the year to you, we focus on the theme 'rights with dignity', remembering that God has created every single person in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Therefore it is only natural to expect that our rights are given to us with dignity.

Living with dignity is a basic human right, but is often denied in the unequal world of today. It is against God's will that we live in divided communities and scattered societies. In many Asian countries, people are living with fear in inhumane conditions. Achieving our mission of advancing democracy, prosperity, and security is not possible without empowerment of the people. If the poor and marginalised do not participate in the democratic political process, there can never be sustainable peace and security for the next generation.

Human dignity and rights are two sides of the same coin and therefore not divisible. The commitment to human dignity should encompass ethical and moral elements, along with its legal dimensions. It is the mission of all humans who value natural rights to uphold individual dignity against all kinds of discrimination by embracing the culture of life. It is important to recognise that rights are fundamental to Christian ethics and should not be ignored in any way. It is not easy to recognise rights and demand them with dignity. Hence, it becomes an imminent

task for churches to understand the dynamics of their communities and prepare them to ask for their rights, so that they can achieve the dignity they deserve.

The right to dignity can be attained by increasing awareness and supporting the mechanisms promoting rights at national, regional and global levels. No society can develop without peace and security. No state can claim to be developed, if its people are victimised by poverty and despair. Nations can not be secure and prosperous, if the basic human rights and dignity of their citizens are not protected. In short, lack of respect for rights and dignity is a major reason why achieving world peace today is so difficult and why resources are unequally distributed.

The church should be committed to sustain efforts in improving the theological standing on the issues of rights. CCA and its member churches have a significant role to play in this regard. The lack of human dignity and rights is against the will of the Creator. The Bible demands that we uphold human rights with dignity and work for it with courage. This is so that hope is brought back to people, who live in the dark shadows of fear.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, the birthday of our Saviour, we have a brilliant opportunity as churches and communities to renew our struggle for human dignity. It is important that we prepare ourselves theologically as well as spiritually to face the challenges of achieving rights with dignity.

I wish you a blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

—Prawate Khid-arn

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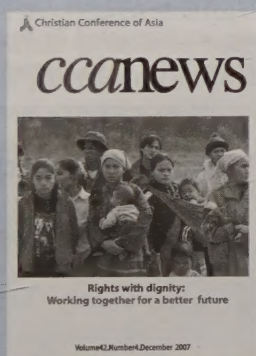


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Transforming conflicts

How can churches build their capacities for peacemaking?

After 9/11, the threat of violence in the name of religion has become the sharp focus of debate

As conflicts continue in Asia, the need for peacebuilding becomes more urgent than ever. The political conflicts in countries such as Sri Lanka, Philippines, Pakistan and Indonesia are costing many lives. Therefore the need to strengthen our efforts as churches in resolving conflicts is a great challenge.

Since CCA is intensively involved in promoting the Decade to Overcome Violence in Asia, it is important to analyse conflict management in our regional contexts. There is a need for consultations, pastoral visits and advocacy to help churches and communities resolve conflicts and tensions arising in their surroundings. It is also important to create better understanding among people on how to overcome violence without being violent, following Christian teachings.

After 9/11 the threat of violence in the name of religion came into sharp focus. In countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the churches are a mi-

nority community having to respond to the growing pressures from fundamentalist groups. In these countries the freedom to practise religion with dignity as ensured in national constitutions has been curtailed to a great extent. Public discourse on matters pertaining to Islam has become highly sensitive in the past few years.

In this context, CCA developed a program: 'Training of Trainers - School for Peace Building and Conflict Transformation in South Asia' which was held on 10 - 17 September 2007 in Katunayake, Sri Lanka. The training aimed to help participants deal with situations where Christians, along with people of other faiths, are faced with conflicts. It was designed to equip participants with skills to address conflicts and restore peace in their communities. Fourteen participants from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka attended the training, accompanied by four resource persons from Sri Lanka, Japan and CCA.



Building capacities

The training emphasised the concept of national solidarity in order to help churches develop better working relationships with state and faith communities. It aimed to enhance the capacities of church workers in peace building and conflict transformation, as well as identifying and exploring participants' diverse views. The discussions helped participants to improve their ap-

Some participants at the School for Peace Building and Conflict Transformation in South Asia

proaches in resolving conflicts and to gain alternative ideas and strategies necessary for conflict transformation.

During the exchange of views participants' level of readiness to learn was given due importance in strategy of the training. The resource persons considered it better not to proceed too far, if the participants were not yet 'ready'. Rather they highlighted participants' commitments by identifying their needs and helping them recognise the challenges in their own situations.

Raising the questions

A positive learning experience occurs when participants are actively engaged in the process. Raising questions is fundamental part of learning that further instigates discussions. The debate can be positive only when the questions do not require exact 'right' answers. All answers need to be treated as a contribution to the groups' understanding. When people observe that their answers are not considered 'wrong' they are more likely to contribute actively. Participants like to share and engage in interesting activities. They all love stories. Sharing personal anecdotes that help illustrate a point sparks lively debate. Encouraging participants to personalise the training materials with their own stories makes a greater contribution towards learning.

To have effective discourse in the debate it is better to work on conflicts experienced by the participants in their own contexts. Personal experiences are especially valuable because they engage participants in moving between concepts and real behaviours.

Evaluating the training

Significant critical reflections and evaluations of the training came from the participants. Many of them said that the training equipped them with appropriate skills in addressing and resolving conflict situations. They expressed their aim to continue developing their skills and knowledge after the training, in order to effectively respond to conflicts in their communities. Participants observed that to work as peacebuilder in complicated conflict situations requires the role of a 'cooperative power'. The training was able to provide them with knowledge, skills and understandings about conflicts. They recommended to continue such trainings at all levels for churches in future.

Participants also appreciated how the training was organised, the training facilities, accommodation and food, resource persons and their approach and strategies of interacting. They found the worship creative and diverse in expression. They also felt that the communication and group dynamics during the training were very positive.

Participants pointed out the lack of time as a constraint for having in-depth study of training materials. They recommended that CCA continue such trainings in future. National councils and local churches should also utilise their own resources to conduct trainings for conflict management and peacebuilding in their own countries.

—Tony Waworuntu



Towards a multicultural engagement

Churches empowered for multicultural ministry and solidarity

Our pursuit of just relations between races, cultures and religions, must be a common aim for all

To be Asian is to be multicultural, but are churches in Asia truly engaged in multicultural ministry and solidarity? This was the question behind the holding of Southeast Asia subregional consultation-workshop on 'Empowering the Church for Multicultural Ministry and Solidarity' in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 16-20 September 2007.

The consultation was organised by the Faith, Mission and Unity (FMU) program area of CCA, with support from the International Network on Multicultural Ministries set up by the World Council of Churches and hosted by the Council of Churches in Malaysia.

"Multiculturalism is a positive feature of society when people are able to celebrate cultural diversity and show acceptance and respect for one another's traditions. It is negative when the dominant population imposes

its will upon others and represents a melting-pot point of view, where the minorities are required to assimilate themselves into the fold of the majority," said Rev. Dr Hermen Shastri, general secretary of the Council of Churches in Malaysia (CCM), in his address to open the consultation.

"Our pursuit of just relations between races, cultures and religions must be a common search of all in societies for establishing the essential values that can sustain a plural society. Belief in democracy, equal rights for all citizens under the law, respect for a shared heritage and the celebration of diversity are crucial aspects in this task." Dr Shastri added.

Yong Ting Jin, coordinator of the Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology (AWRC), facilitated some exercises on culture, using a seven-level framework of analysis. The seven levels are: (a) superiority, when one thinks of one's culture as the best; (b) tolerance or mere coexistence; (c) liberal pluralism, an attitude that says there are many religions and cultures but mine is still better; (d) inter-cultural or interreligious dialogue; (e) critique of one's culture or religion; (f) making coalition with others who are critical in looking at culture/religion, and (g) working towards common projects of liberative syncretism. Moving to the fifth level, i.e. critique of one's culture, requires a qualitative leap from intercultural or interreligious dialogue. But it marks the first step of liberation.

Facilitating a survey and analysis of Asian realities, Fr Philip Thomas, Cor Episcopa of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Malaysia, stressed the need for more inclusive world views since "human relations continue to break down when different worldviews and



An interfaith ritual at the consultation-workshop

ideologies come into confrontation". This requires a re-examination of the purpose of religion in order to avoid overemphasis of particular doctrines, which can be easily misused or abused. Affirming that diversity is the creation of God, Fr Philip said, "Diversity adds beauty and colour to the whole creation." The existence of other religions and cultures reminds us of our own uniqueness and shortcoming for the other religion is like a mirror for us to see how we look at life," he added.

The group of twenty-six participants included church workers, ordained pastors, seminary lecturers, lay leaders, women and youth from Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar and Malaysia. They came from Protestant, Catholic and Assemblies of God church backgrounds. The participation of a Buddhist monk from Thailand enriched the gathering and enabled the group to experience living with someone from another faith. Participants came as resource persons and shared their own experiences of success and struggle in dealing with the plurality of cultures and religions around them.

Rev. Broery Hendriks from the Moluccas in Indonesia shared his experience of affirming non violence in the context of ethnic and religious conflicts. Rev. Dr Tabita Kartika Christiani of Yogyakarta, Indonesia shared her critique of some attempts at multiculturalism in the church's ministry,

particularly in worship.

A visit to two organizations whose work cuts across religious and ethnic lines served as a learning experience about the struggles of various groups of people. The struggles of Sisters in Islam (SIS) included empowering women for their rights and dignity. A Call to Serve (ACTS) was set up in response to the growing refugee and migrant population in Malaysia, with a focus on health.

Participants were actively involved in small group discussions and workshops. They defined multicultural ministry in the context of Asian plurality not so much as a ministry but as engagement in all aspects of life with all sorts of people, sharing common humanity and loving one's neighbour as oneself, crossing borders, getting out of one's comfort zone, building friendship, healing and reconciliation, sharing common struggles and doing common projects to bring harmony, peace and justice.

Grouping according to their vocations, they also made their own action plans on how to sensitize their constituencies back home for genuine multicultural engagement - in churches, seminaries and communities.

—Hope S. Antone

The existence of other religions and cultures reminds us of our own uniqueness and shortcomings

Selected papers from the consultation will be published in *CTC Bulletin*, December 2007 edition.



Participants in a visit with Sisters in Islam

Peace and unification

What role can churches play to bring the Korean peninsula together?

Religion can go beyond the political, economic, and social boundaries in order to bridge the divides and divisions

To commemorate the 100th anniversary celebrations of the great Korean revival movement that began in Pyongyang in 1907, an international consultation was held on the 'Role of the Church for Peace and Unification in the Korean Peninsula' in Seoul, Korea on 9-11 August 2007. It was organised by the Peace and Unification Committee of the 100th Anniversary Conference of Great Korean Revival. The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) and the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) participated along with international delegates. Three hundred participants, representing churches and ecumenical organisations from around the world attended the lectures and discussed how churches can play a positive role in bringing peace and unification to the Korean peninsula.

The Korean Revival movement

The great Korean revival movement played a pivotal role in spreading Christianity throughout the Korean peninsula. It laid the foundation of the Christian faith in Korea. One result was the writing of a Declaration of the Churches in Korea on National

Reunification and Peace. In such declaration, the Korean Churches committed themselves to labour as apostles of peace, Colossians 3:15. The declaration stated, "God has commanded Korean churches to take up the mission of overcoming divides and divisions and the confrontation of the north and the south. And thus churches are obligated to work for the realisation of unification and peace." The commitment was grounded in Matthew 5:23-24.

This landmark declaration raised the need for churches to share the pain of national divisions to achieve unification. In this context, Christianity is naturally related to the unification movement for the two sides of Korea. Therefore, what Korean churches need today is not just religious exchanges but more extensive commitment for peace and reconciliation.

The role of religion

Religion can go beyond political, economic and social boundaries to bridge the divides and divisions. Churches have the capability to bring genuine reconciliation and trust between the two sides of Korea. All religious communities, including Christians, need to contribute actively towards reconciliation and peacemaking within their own communities and the entire Korean peninsula.

The conference emphasised that, today we encounter a world in turmoil largely because of unequal distribution of power and resources. There is a growing trend to settle disputes through force of arms instead of



dialogue and negotiation. This results in the increase of violence and conflicts. We have witnessed how the end of the cold war did not bring peace. However it did bring attention to the dangers of a nuclear war, particularly where enmity between superpowers is a threat to global security. Today, we face a variety of security concerns that have serious implications for international relations. These include war in Iraq, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the military confrontation in the Korean peninsula, and conflicts in Africa, Europe and other continents as a result of religious extremism and ethnocentric nationalism. No government can be expected to contain or resolve these security issues in a blink of an eye. Addressing them requires a collective approach by multiple actors, including churches and civil society.

The great spiritual revival movement that swept Korea hundred years ago is known today as a 'Godly heritage'. However, while celebrating the movements of the past and addressing the issues of today, we must not forget that the future remains in God's hands. We can hope for the great revival for Korea and the world, delighting in the good news of God's kingdom drawing nearer.

At the end of conference participants came up with several recommendations and commitments. They shared their concerns with the North and South Korean governments to be considered before the second Korean Summit.

Recommendations for governments and policy makers

- The summit should lead to the establishment of peace in the Korean peninsula by fulfilling the pledge to make the Korean peninsula a nuclear weapons free zone and subsequently by signing a peace treaty to replace the existing armistice.
- The summit should open ways for North and South Korea to develop economically in a balanced manner, through the establishment of a comprehensive economic development plan.
- The summit should contribute to invigorating and widening exchanges at political, military, social, cultural, and religious levels. This should be implemented through the promotion of exchange and cooperation projects that contribute to reconciliation and peace.
- The summit should contribute to peaceful coexistence through increased commitment to humanitarian support, such as the provision of foodstuffs and the reunion of separated families.
- The government officials of North and South Korea should make use of the historic opportunity that this summit presents to achieve concrete steps towards unification.

Recommendations for churches in Korea

Churches should:

- unite on a clearly articulated understanding of unification in the Korean peninsula based on the biblical vision of 'Shalom',



Corazon Tabing-Reyes, Moumita Biswas and Dr Esther Byu:
See related story on page 30, 31

- lift up theological underpinnings of peace and unification and what it means to be a church in a situation of division and brokenness, as a reconciling and healing community.
- deepen and strengthen the relationship among all Christians regardless of differences based on denominations and gender in order to work collectively for peace and unification.
- continue their positive contribution to the alleviation of suffering for the powerless and vulnerable of Korea.
- join people of other faiths and civil society groups for the common cause of peace and unification.

Recommendations for churches around the world

- lift up churches and the people of Korea in prayer.
- recognise that peace and unification in the Korean peninsula is a regional issue with global implications.
- urge churches of the nations that participate in the Six Party Talks (North and South Korea, the United States, China, Japan and Russia) and welcome the initiative of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to facilitate a parallel meeting of the churches. At the same time, we request and encourage WCC to promote the cooperation and contribution of the wider Christian communities, such as the Consortium for Social Development in North Korea, CCA and NCKK.
- engage their governments and communities in advocating peace and unification in the Korean peninsula by strengthening networks of solidarity and peace education.

—Tony Waworuntu

Life skills and livelihood

How can disadvantage youth become positive and healthy members of society?

Young people, especially those economically and socially disadvantaged, generally face greater difficulties in securing jobs

Youth unemployment is a growing problem as the benefits of globalisation and technological developments have yet to reach millions of youth in the developing countries. Indeed globalisation and technological change have exacerbated an already vulnerable situation, widening the gap between young entrants to the labour force and experienced workers, between young women and men with well paid and productive work and those with low wage and poor quality jobs.

The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Global Employment Trends Brief 2007 reported that even though more people are working globally than ever before, the number of unemployed people grew to an all time high of 195.2 million in 2006 - a global rate of 6.3 per cent. This rate was almost unchanged from the previous year.

Unemployment hits young people (aged 15 to 24) the hardest - 86.3 million representing 44 per cent of the world's total unemployed.

Young people, especially those economically and socially disadvantaged, generally face greater difficulties in securing jobs. They are less likely to have a good basic education and training, have limited access to sexual and reproductive health information and services and are often discriminated against based on age, race, social class and gender. In many urban environments, young people are often left on their own when there is a breakdown in family relationships or similar circumstances. They face increased risks from dropping out of school, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Hence there is a definite need to prepare young people for productivity and healthy integration into their changing societies. The governments, NGOs, religious institutions and civil society must pay immediate attention to focus on young people's economic, health and basic social needs.

Skills for livelihoods impact risk behaviour

The sexual and reproductive health behaviour of young people is closely linked with their educational and economic options. Teenage pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS have enormous impact in terms of educational and livelihood opportunities. In the CCA-UNESCAP joint project "Strengthening Life Skills for Positive Youth Health Behaviour", findings from the baseline surveys conducted in four countries (Cambodia, China, Sri Lanka and Philippines) have confirmed this aspect.

Vulnerable disadvantaged youth need an integrated program to strengthen life skills and to say no to risky behaviour. Life-skills-based HIV prevention education must continually be emphasized when working with vulnerable young people. However, life skills alone are not enough. Efforts must be made



Young girls learn hand embroidery at Mattakuliya community, Colombo

to help young women and men enter the labour market and gain employment opportunities. This is critical to their future social and economic opportunities as well as their exposure to health risks and overall wellbeing. Therefore, in addition to life-skills-based trainings, national counterpart organizations (NCOs), Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka and Pasay City Cooperative Development Office in the Philippines have explored opportunities for livelihood skills training, employment and job placements. Emphasis has been placed on linking health and education programs and policies with employment and livelihood opportunities.

Forging multiple partnerships in Pasay City

To address livelihood/vocational training requirements of out-of-school youth in Pasay City, Philippines, the Pasay City Cooperative Development Office is working in close association with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), a national government agency that takes care of the skills training requirement, the Department of Education, a national government agency that offers both formal and non-formal education for elementary and high school level, and Manpower Cooperative, a private business organization that facilitates placement of jobs among qualified out-of-school youth.

During the conduct of a number of Peer Educator's Training (PET) in Pasay City, the out-of-school youth were assessed regarding their livelihood skills. Those out-of-school youth who have a high school diploma are recommended for demand-oriented livelihood skills training through partnership with TESDA and PESO (Pasay City Employment Center). They are then encouraged to join the Manpower Cooperative for training and skills for specific jobs.

Those out-of-school youth who are non-high school graduates are encouraged to avail themselves of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the Department of Education. The youth who are enrolled in the Alternative Learning School (ALS) program can earn an elementary or high school diploma. The out-of-school youth are also provided a scholarship grant (free or study now pay later).

The training courses currently initiated for out-of-school youth are barista - coffee making course, reflexology/massage therapy training, housekeeping and others.



Massage Therapy training by TESDA, Pasay City

Sewing classes in Mattakuliya community, Colombo

In the Mattakuliya community in Colombo, the mothers of the young women were of the opinion that their daughters would benefit by learning to sew during their free time. This would be a means for some small earnings for their daughters.

In response to their request, Sarvodaya has initiated a hand embroidery course to train young women. Approximately 15 have currently enrolled into their program. Classes are conducted on a weekly basis at the Sri Wickramasinharamaya Temple premises in the Mattakuliya area. Sarvodaya has provided initial assistance for materials like sewing frames, fabric and thread.



Participants at the Mid Term Review of CCA-UNESCAP project "Strengthening Life Skills for Positive Youth Health Behavior" held on 5-6 November, Bangkok

Life changing experiences



Pasay youth at the Training of Trainers Program

Maria Clarris David-23 years old

I thought Life Skills Training will be something only how to deal with everyday life problems. But the training is a lot more than that! It made me understand the importance of having good health by avoiding the diseases. I heard about it for the first time only during the training. There were discussions about sex related diseases. After hearing about these problems, I feel sorry for the girls who are sex workers or the ones who get into sexual relationships with one and more than one partner.

The most important lesson I learnt from the training is how to take care of ourselves.



Youth share lessons learnt at the life skills training

After the training, I decided to share these lessons with my younger sister. I gave her the materials to read and explained to her what I heard and discussed during the training. I do not want her to be ignorant. At the age of 13, she must know what to do or how to deal with different circumstances, good or bad.

My understanding of several things grew a lot in the training. Now I know that I do not need to spend more money for going to school. The local government and other agencies can help and assist students like me, who cannot afford to go to school.

This program of UNESCAP is good. Even college graduates can benefit from the Life Skills Trainings. I wish all out-of-school youth gets to know that there is free education for young people like us. I wish this kind of program would go on everywhere, so that those who need help in learning the skills can benefit from such trainings.

Ernestoy Gomez Junior-19 years old

In the beginning I thought the training would be something 'old fashioned and outdated'. I never thought that I would enjoy it so much. I found it to be very interesting and special. I learnt so many things about Life Skills. It is a great help for young people like us, who have no jobs. At first, I was scared but as the training went by, I felt already at ease. I am glad that I attended the training, otherwise I would have regretted.

The training taught me to have confidence while working. I learnt how to behave like a good man. It taught me also to change the way I look at life. I learnt how to say no to drugs.

As of now, I do not know anyone with whom I can share my experience. I come from another province and I am staying with my aunt. I do not know anyone yet. But the moment I will make new friends I will share with them about Life Skills. Because I know, they can also learn a lot.

Whoever has done this program for us, I am thankful to them. I wish that there would be more trainings to teach young people like us and help them learn the skills they need in life. I feel that God has used these people as instruments to help us get sound mind and a healthy body.

—Shirley Susan

Breaking the silence

Churches to address sexual abuse against women and children

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November was a result of United Nations Resolution 54/134 in 1999. This is the day when three Mirabal sisters from the Dominican Republic were assassinated for being constant critics of Rafael Le nidas Trujillo's dictatorship. Since then this day honours the Mirabal sisters, who gave birth to a strong public movement against Trujillo's brutal dictatorship.

This UN resolution engages governments, international and non governmental organisations to raise public awareness about violence against women. It has brought the world's attention to how violence against women is a constraint in achieving equality, development and peace. It has also brought concern to women groups such as indigenous women, refugee women, migrant women, women living in rural or remote communities, destitute women, women in institutions or in detention, girl children, women with disabilities, elderly women and women in situations of armed conflicts, who are vulnerable to violence.

In this context it was recognised that violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which has led to domination and discrimination against women. Violence against women is one of the crucial issues by which women are forced into subordinate positions as compared to men. Therefore it was urged through the declaration that the rights of women and girl children are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and there is a need to further promote and protect them.

According to article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the term "violence against women" implies "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result into physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to

women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".

Violence against women is a wide phenomenon spread over different regional, political, religious contexts and realities. However, the following categories can serve as the basis of identifying violence against women as an issue.

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking of women and forced prostitution.

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs.

Being a victim of violence

Harassment is one of the worst kinds of violence, known to women for ages. As a woman I have experienced and suffered from violence, including sexual abuse and sexual harassment. When I was only eight years old, my uncle touched my breast and I was too young to know that it was sexual abuse. I did not dare to tell my parents because I

Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women



was afraid they would beat me and accuse me of fabricating a story against my uncle.

When I was a university student, I faced an attempt of rape by one of my senior friends, who afterwards continued his master's studies in divinity and is now serving as a church pastor. In another incident, I experienced sexual harassment by an elder of a famous church in Chiang Mai, who asked me to sleep with him when I was alone in my apartment.

When such violence happens it takes a lot of courage to speak out. Like many other victims of violence, I also had to be brave enough to speak about it. I had to explain to people that it was not 'my fault'. Fortunately, most of the people who heard my stories believed me, despite the fact that talking about sexual abuse and harassment in our culture is a taboo. Many times it is taken merely as a joke by the society, regardless of how painful it is for the ones who suffer this violence.

As an advocate for the rights of women and children for more than fifteen years, I have heard stories and experiences of violence. Most of cases were often about sexual abuse and harassment issues. It happens in all situations and settings including families and even churches.

Some years ago, I was working on the case of a twelve-year old girl, who was raped by her village pastor and an elder of a city church, where she was boarding during school time. Both abusers were proved guilty and were sentenced to jail. In the beginning the victim was embarrassed to tell anyone as it happened in a church and she was afraid that people would think that she had made up a story. At that time the city church committee refused my interventions arguing that this would damage 'church reputation'. I challenged the church by saying that they should protect the victim not the abuser. It is Christian reputation which will be damaged if a church starts protecting abusers rather than the victims. In such situations it is important that churches are challenged to play their role rather than siding with the perpetrators of violence. The Christian teaching of protecting human rights and dignity is something churches need to show through actions along with the preaching.

There are many other stories of women who are sexually abused by their church pastors. These victims are often voiceless and afraid to tell, due to several reasons. One is the fear of being stigmatised in the church

community and society. The other is that they feel they will not be able to explain that it was not 'their fault'.

The church has to be a safe place for all, including women and children. Church leaders and congregation members must condemn all kinds of violence and should not let abuse happen in their communities. Churches need to work more to make sure that women and children in their congregations are safe and that sexual violence does not happen.

A church pastor who is proven guilty of sexual abuse should be dismissed immediately from a position in church. The investigation against such perpetrators should be held without any bias and the related criminal laws should be used against them to insure justice. Churches should not keep silent about sexual violence. They need to break the silence. The situation can be much worse if such violence keeps on happening. Churches should formulate a policy not to recruit a pastor who has a reputation of sexual abuse. Gender concerns and human rights are subjects that should be part of the curriculum in seminaries. It has to be part of Christian education so that students learn to respect all human beings and their rights, especially of women and children.

Ending the violence

Christmas is a time for love and peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Every year we are told that Jesus Christ is born in our life today. However, we need to realise that it is not only on Christmas Day that we need to think of others, but on each day of the year. Let us celebrate this Christmas by aiming to end violence against women and children in the church. Let us all enjoy singing the song 'silent night, holy night' without ignoring the 'silent voices' of women and children who are oppressed and abused.

—Janejinda Pawadee

Women building peace

*Tell me why are you so afraid?
Come and serve God.
His grace is all we need,
Oh my beloved, his grace is all we need,
Come and serve God.
Tell me why are we suffering?
Tell why are they blaming you?
Tell me why we have enemies?
Come and serve God.*

(Adapted from Khmer song from Cambodia)

Twenty-seven women leaders sang this song together in the CCA-Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) meeting organised in partnership with the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) on 9-13 October 2007 in Bangkok. The theme was "Challenges, Struggles and Strategies: Asian Women Building Communities of Peace". The participants represented women/gender desks of churches and national councils from the region. The women participants, along with three men participants, reaffirmed their commitment for building communities of peace and discussed the theme in depth.

The main aim of the meeting was to strengthen networking among Christian women leaders in order to strategise together on how churches can engage in ministry to overcome violence against women, children and vulnerable communities. Reflections on how to promote gender justice and women's leadership were shared among the participants. Women's involvement in CCA's gender justice programs, participatory decision making and their implementation in 2008 were discussed.

Challenges and struggles

Reports by the participants raised numerous challenges each country is faced with. It showed how Asian women are not passive victims of violence but are making efforts for peacebuilding, healing and reconciliation. Their efforts are sparking transformation and

bringing awareness about several women issues.

Female infanticide and foeticide

Female infanticide and foeticide are grave issues in India. The ratio of females to male has decreased from 952 female-1000 male to 900 females-1000 males. In India generally girl children are considered a burden as parents pay huge dowries for their marriages. In rural India some midwives are trained to choke newborn baby girls to death. Family members also take part in such crimes. Throwing infant girls in gutters to die is one such hideous crime. In one incident fifty skulls of female foetuses were found in a well near a nursing home, said Swabita Swaraj, president of the All India Council of Christian Women. Foeticide is also practised in urban India and even in the educated families. Modern technology is used to abort female foetuses in clinics. "Where are our missing daughters?" asked Swaraj. In her opinion no government legislation can improve the situation unless the deep-rooted prejudice against girl children is eliminated. The church needs to wake up and do something to overcome such violence.

Women are making efforts for peacebuilding and are engaged in activities of healing and reconciliation



Dr Unha Chai (in middle) moderating discussion

Indigenous people in Australia

More Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders live in abject poverty in otherwise rich Australia. Their life expectancy is seventeen years less than other Australians. Many indigenous infants die before they are one year old and some mothers lose their lives during child birth due to inadequate health facilities. There is a dramatic increase in the number of indigenous women being imprisoned. At the same time the number of deaths, injuries and suicide among indigenous people is rising. The campaign "Make Indigenous Poverty History" started in 2005 by National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC). This is a response to the global Millennium Development Goals. Catherine Loy, Graeme Mundine and Gabrielle Mundine, representatives of National Council of Churches in Australia, asked CCA to focus more on the issues of indigenous people.

Acid attacks

Acid attacks are another vicious form of violence prevalent in Bangladesh. Sulphuric acid is thrown on victims, which results into

the damage of face and body. Along with physical pain, great psychological trauma and alienation is faced by the victims, usually women. Half of them are below the age of eighteen. The reasons for acid attacks include refusal to sexual advances or marriage proposals, family feuds and land disputes. In 2007, sixty-four women, nineteen children and twenty-seven men became victims of acid attack. Gloria Kalpana Sirkar, a participant in the meeting, emphasised that church has a major role to play in campaigning against such violence. There is a great need for advocacy, awareness raising and training programs to support the victims of acid attacks.

Political violence

"How long are we going to suffer under the military dictatorship?" a participant from Burma asked. Another participant from Indonesia said, "[Remembering] the tragic incident of Semanggi in May 1998 when Chinese women were burnt- ethnic minority in Indonesia in Jakarta, [I ask] how long will women face the scourge of political violence?"

Strategising for peace

The participants strategised on how CCA-EGY, in partnership with churches "life in its fullness" could bring faith into action for the year 2008. The participants emphasised the need for capacity enhancement and training programs for conflict transformation and overcoming violence against women and children. The School of Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice was considered necessary to alleviate suffering and building inclusive communities of peace. The need for advocacy and campaign to promote rights of women and children and indigenous women's leadership development were pointed out by the participants as areas of concern in peacebuilding.

—Moumita Biswas



Swabita Swaraj campaigning for peace.

CCA visit to Europe

For the first time, a delegation from the Christian Conference of Asia visited partners in Europe on 14-30 October 2007 for the purpose of exchanging views and concerns on various issues and exploring ways of strengthening cooperation. The idea of a visit by a CCA delegation was suggested by ecumenical partners in Europe in 2001 and reiterated in 2006.

The CCA delegation consisted of Ms Manju Baroi (member of the CCA presidium), Bishop Thomas Soo (honorary treasurer), Mr Anthony Row (member of General and Executive Committees), Dr Hope Antone (Executive Secretary for Faith, Mission and Unity) and Dr Prawate Khid-arn (General Secretary). The group visited twenty ecumenical organizations in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom.

"Rather than for fund raising, the visit aimed for CCA and Asian churches' holistic ministries to be known by European ecumenical partners, specialised ministries and churches," Dr Prawate emphasised. Through face-to-face exchange, the delegation also came to understand the changes and challenges faced by partner churches and ecumenical organizations in Europe.

As the CCA delegation shared a number of challenges faced in Asia, European partners also shared their own struggles, including keeping the ecumenical vision in the wake of growing secularism in Europe, where the church may soon find itself to be a minority rather than the majority. There is a great concern about migration and the integration of people from other countries - many of whom are forced to leave their communities due to war, persecution, poverty or environ-

The church may not be as professional as some NGOs but it can learn to be more professional without giving up its nature of being church



CCA delegation with Archbishop Anders Wejryd (Fourth from left-front row) of the Church of Sweden and other leaders



CCA delegates at Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland



Exchanging gifts after a fruitful meeting with the Kerkinactie staff of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

mental destruction.

Issues that CCA shared with ecumenical partners include poverty alleviation, food security, relief and rehabilitation, HIV/AIDS, peace and security, civic and political space (including human rights) and conflict transformation. There is an increasing concern about climate change, which is one of the greatest environmental, social and economic threats facing the planet today.

A number of partners wanted to hear about relevant changes in the Asian context and within CCA - its work on mission and theology and its relationship with churches (mainline and others) and other faith communities in Asia. In terms of ownership by member churches and councils, the delegation assured the partners that there has been an increase in membership fees paid by the constituency and also a good amount of non-quantified in-kind contribution in the form of hosting meetings, assemblies or the anniversary event, where the host member churches and councils shouldered the board and lodging costs of the participants.

The delegation assured partners that, for the sake of peace and conflict transformation, CCA tries to integrate intra-faith and interfaith dialogue and cooperation in various programs, while addressing common issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender justice, human rights and peace. While there are non-governmental organisations that are addressing similar socioeconomic and political concerns, CCA's role is to reflect on and address them from Christian theological and ethical perspectives.

"Compared to NGOs, ecumenical organisations such as CCA have a wider membership base and therefore work for capacity building, empowerment and transformation can be seen as wider and more sustainable. The church may not be as professional as some NGOs but it can learn to be a bit more professional without giving up its nature of being church," said Anthony Row.

The visit was coordinated by the WCC staff for Regional Relations in Asia.

—Hope Antone and Prawate Khid-arn

Youth at the forefront

Young people to play a vital role in the ecumenical movement

Kofi Annan, the former General Secretary of UN once said, "Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies."

Role of church

Violence in its many forms and manifestations is increasing in Asia. It is often youth who are mobilised to be engaged in activities of violence. At the same time young people are also agents of transformation, breaking the status quo and challenging the unjust structures of society. They take part in revolutionary and courageous activities and raise their prophetic voices. However it is a reality that the voices of youth are suppressed in Asia. Despite being active in the church, they are often sidelined by church leaders. Here, CCA facilitates ecumenical formation and leadership development of youth to bridge the gap between older leadership and the new generation and to strengthen youth ecumenical movement in the face of globalisation.

SELF

The School for Ecumenical Leadership Formation (SELF) is one such endeavour of CCA, in partnership with World Student Christian Movement-Asia Pacific Region (WSCF- AP), to promote youth ecumenical formation. It is a leadership development project which provides space for youth and involves youth in the decision making process of churches and society. The 4th SELF was held on 2-22 September 2007 at the Ecumenical Institute for Spirituality and Federation (EISD) in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The theme of the training was "Young People Working towards Wider Ecumenism in a Pluralistic

Society". Thirty-two young people from seventeen countries in Asia and the Pacific participated in a three-week intensive training program.

Young voices

"I am Ellora Antonia from Bangladesh. For me SELF has been a milestone in my ecumenical journey. SELF provided me the opportunity to understand that as youth we have the power to change the world. The exposure program enabled me to know about the agony of people in Sri Lanka, who are suffering due to conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. I wonder what role Asian churches have played in the process of peace, healing and reconciliation. I understand ecumenism is all about love and agape [alternative globalisation addressing people and earth] and not just preaching but practising."

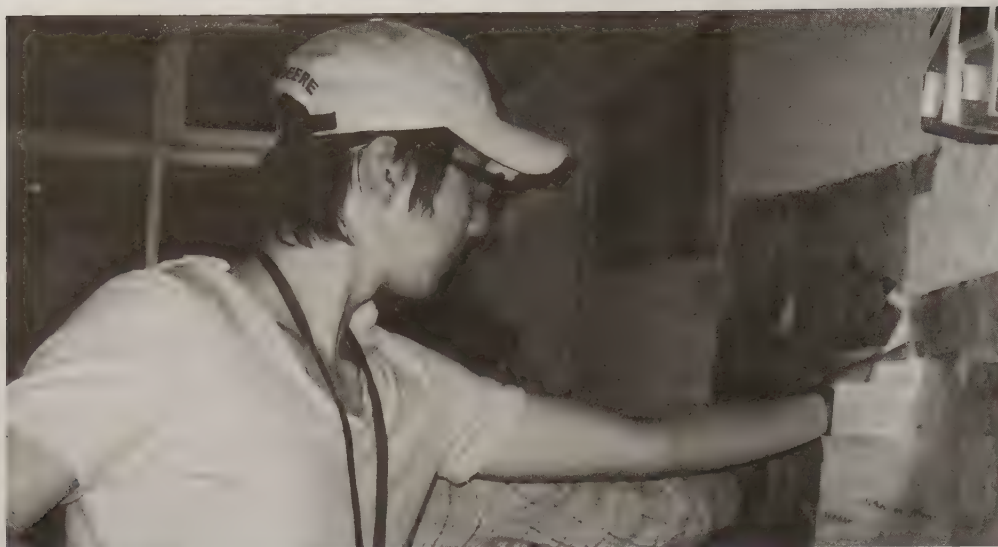
— Ellora Antonia.

"My name is Adimin Vasconcelos Pinto, and I am a SELF participant representing my church IPTL [Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Loro Sae]. I come from a newborn nation, East Timor. My country was formally recognised by the United Nation on 20 May 2002. The history of my nation is rooted in war, conflict and oppression. For 450 years the Portuguese colonised us, then Indonesian dictators ruled us for twenty-four years. We

Young people are the agents of transformation, breaking status quo and challenging unjust structures of society



Ellora Antonia



Korean participant at SELF

Young people
should be at the
forefront of global
change and
innovation

have faced different forms of violence, our women were raped and abused by soldiers mercilessly, our houses were burnt and the properties confiscated. Our people fled to other countries as refugees or ran in the wilderness and hills especially during the violent conflicts in 1999 and 2006.

"Such experiences of violence are embedded in my memory and my heart breaks when I narrate my story. My own house has been burnt and my family is living in refugee camps like many others. Thousands of houses were burnt in Dili last year. When memories of horror haunt me, I find no hope for me to survive. Many times as a youth I feel it is better to keep silent for self defence rather than to be abused, tortured or killed. Then I

feel that Jesus is our Saviour and he will give me courage to be an agent of peace, healing and reconciliation.

"The SELF program has helped me a lot. I got hope that as a youth leader I can work for peace in my country. I have new friends now from different countries, who give me courage to hope and survive. I will share the knowledge and the experiences I got from this training program with my young friends in my country, especially with youth in the church. Thank you CCA and WSCF- AP for giving me hope." -Admin Vasconeclos

—Moumita Biswas



SELF Participants

Pakistan says "no more"

What does the future hold for a country in chaos?

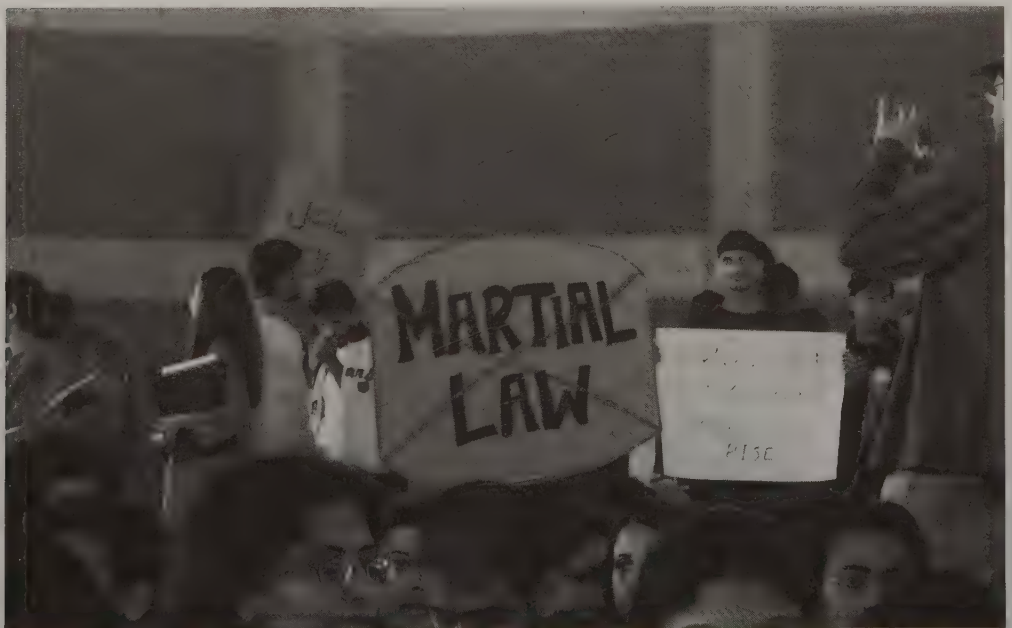
Hope lies in the brilliant resistance of Pakistani people, who dared to say no to the autocratic state forces

Political upheavals and turbulence are not something new for Asia. Recent months have seen complex power games and huge struggles for democracy in the region. Pakistan is only one of these countries. The imposition of the state of emergency declared by President General Pervez Musharraf in November was rooted in a complex scenario. According to government the reasons were the uncontrollable Islamic militants and a hostile judiciary, which was hindering the progress of the country. However later events proved government claims quite false as a brutal crackdown on civil society, including media, lawyers, judges, human right activists and students was seen by the entire world. The unarmed peaceful protesters were detained and beaten. To hide this from the world independent news channels were taken off air. The constitution was suspended under a Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) and the chief justice of Pakistan and judges were removed and put under house arrest. Political rallies were broken down and many party workers were

sent to jail.

Why emergency?

According to several political analysts the reasons behind the state of emergency are complex. One reason, known as the "hostile judiciary" by the government is actually the strong lawyer's movement, which in past months has asserted itself for independence. The Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, was removed unconstitutionally which triggered protests from lawyers, judges and civil society all over the country. The media played a significant role in reporting the incidents to the people. Due to mounting pressure from people the decision of removal from the government was taken back and the chief justice was reinstated. Another possible reason for declaring the state of emergency was that the Supreme Court was about to give a verdict on whether President Musharraf could hold the two offices as chief of the army staff and president simultaneously.



Another aspect to the situation was the coming back of exiled former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who was welcomed by a huge number of people at the Karachi airport. However this was followed by the unfortunate incident of bomb explosion at the crowd resulting into deaths of more than hundred people. Later Bhutto condemned the state of emergency and called for a political rally, which was made difficult by the deployment of hundreds of police in Rawalpindi. At the same time another exiled former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was deported from the airport on his arrival to the country and was allowed to return later.

In the past few months pressure from the US, which supported the first coup by General Musharraf, increased to curb the Islamic militants in Pakistan. Being a key ally to the US "war on terror" the Pakistani government was asked to do more to control radicals and militants in the country. This did not seem to be the case however, as the incidents of suicide bombing and explosions increased. Instead it was civil society rather than the militants that seemed to keep the Pakistani government occupied. After the imposition of the state of emergency US asked the government to restore the constitution, hold elections in January as planned and go back to democracy. However US still emphasised that Pakistan remains a key ally for the "war on terror" and the military support from Pakistan is still much needed.

Christians in Pakistan

Being a minority, Christians have been a vulnerable segment of society since 1970's. Being wrongly associated with the West, they were among those who faced a backlash by the radicals since 9/11. However the same was the case with other non-Muslim faith communities as well as women and youth. The chaotic situation in the country and absence of democracy affected them greatly. However this is the time in the history of Pakistan when all the people, despite differences based on faith, ethnicity, language, gender, profession and cultures have joined voices for their right to democracy. Many faith based and church organisations in the country condemned the emergency and demanded their right to free and fair elections with the return of military to the barracks.

CCA condemns the emergency

In a recent human rights consultation organised by the CCA-Justice and International Affairs, a statement was issued by the participants, representing thirty countries in Asia, saying,

"We are aware that the imposition of the state of emergency by the military government on 3 November 2007 through Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) and has resulted in the arrest of judges, lawyers and human rights activists, including some of their children being harassed, arrested and tortured by the law enforcement agencies. According to media reports many opposition political leaders and party workers have been arrested. All television and radio channels that are not run by the state have been stopped from broadcasting their programs; therefore we vehemently protest and condemn this act."

In a letter to the National Council of Churches in Pakistan (NCCP) CCA stated,

"We are of the view that such drastic measures become the breeding ground for more violence and for the growth and nurturing of extreme and destructive forces, and to the stifling of democratic forces, which are desperately needed at this critical hour to restore law and order in your country. History is a witness that neither dictators nor extremists have been able to govern nations and restore peace and justice to all communities at any given time."

Future of Pakistan

With the chaotic situation and political uncertainty in the country, Pakistan faces a great challenge to return to real democracy and stability. In the current situation, threats from radical militants, bitter politics and continued state of emergency makes transparent electoral process an uphill task. The lack of strong and honest political leadership adds to the crisis. However, hope lies in the brilliant resistance of the Pakistani people, who dared to say no to the autocratic state forces. Their courage sends a message not only to the military government, but also to the world as to what they want for their homeland. Therefore we can have faith in the courage and sacrifices of people struggling for a better and bright future of Pakistan.

—Naveen Qayyum

It was civil society, rather than the militants that seemed to keep the Pakistani government occupied

Lighting a candle

Needs and challenges faced by ecumenical movement in Asia

During my visits to churches in Asia, I have had the privilege to meet many young people, women and men, both ordained and lay. In my conversations with them, I learnt that quite a number of them are disenchanted with the church, arguing that they see the sins of the world also within the church. It puzzles them and they often wonder how and why the church, which claims to be the body of Christ, indulges in such kind of immoral, unethical and corrupt practices. This is not merely a challenge to the institutionalised church but it also makes the most energetic and creative persons of integrity to leave the church in frustration and disappointment. The exodus of people of stature and character from the ecclesia is a spiritual drain, which impoverishes the church and robs from its divine character. When this happens church loses its reason to be the church and also its moral power in an immoral world.

There was a time when people were drawn to church because of the character, charisma and the stature of great women and men, who held leadership positions in the church and the ecumenical movement. They were not politicians but spiritual giants. These people emptied themselves to fill others, rather than manipulating others and subverting the church and ecumenical movement to grab power for them and abusing it for their personal advantage. Due to our silence, when some were playing personal politics, the ecumenical movement as a whole became unattractive to a number of people in different parts of the world. According to some of the best, creative and imaginative people, churches and the ecumenical movement no longer attracted them because of its spiritual bankruptcy and moral impoverishment.

Whether we agree or not with their opinions, we have to accept the fact that it is a severe judgment on the ecumenical movement and the church. Therefore those of us

who are committed to the ecumenical movement and the church have a God given mandate to redeem the church and the ecumenical movement by cleansing them from all forms of corruption and manipulation. It must be redeemed to become a movement in which God's spirit overpowers human spirit, which attracts people from all walks of life. Such a movement can become one of God's liberating instruments to transform the world and heal wounds of the people, communities and nations.

There is a Chinese proverb that says, "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness". Thus, my intention in writing this article is not to pass judgment on any person, but to invite those who are committed to the mission of God's reign on earth, to dedicate themselves to give the best and find the best within and among themselves to equip a new generation of leaders for God's mission on earth. This is a gigantic task but is surely a challenge we should struggle to achieve.

—Rienzie Perera

Ecumenism must redeem itself to be a movement in which God's spirit overpowers human spirit



The unfinished task

(Isaiah 51:4-5)

God's peace and unity will be established as the foundation of the new order of the whole earth

As the hope and vision of the "faithful few" returning from exile fades from sight, Second Isaiah encourages them with a description of the mission of those who wait with hope for the salvation act of God to be established in Israel (Isaiah 50:4-11).

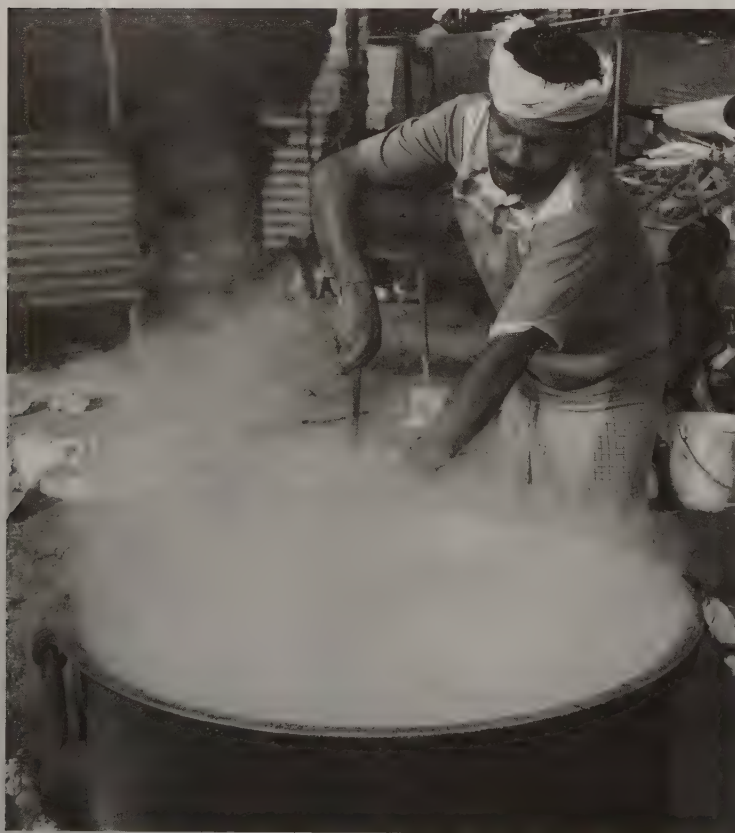
Isaiah makes a vivid portrayal of the restoration of a new nation of Israel with two figures. One is the many descendants of Abraham, and the other is the joyful garden of God (51:1-3). This is a wonderful hope for the faithful servant of God. It is a witness that salvation and restoration comes from the few who are faithful to God rather than the ones who deny God's plan for their future. Following this message of restoration comes an urgent call to mission in the dawning new

age in 51:4-5; 7-8. It is the task and responsibility of the faithful few to carry on the mission of hope and peace to all nations.

*Listen to me, my people
and give ear to me, my nation [my folk];
For a teaching [Torah or law] will go forth from me,
and my justice [Mishpat] for a light to the peoples.
Suddenly my deliverance [or righteousness] draws near [swiftly or speedily],
my salvation goes forth [is on the way]
For my arms will rule [will bring justice to] the peoples;
and the coastlands wait for me,
and for my arm they hope. (Isaiah 51:4-5)*

There are four key words to describe God's purpose of restoration, salvation and peace within and among the nations. These are the laws, justice, deliverance and salvation. This is an assurance that the people of Israel are God's people (Isaiah 51:16). Therefore, God will never forsake them or leave them in despair. They will be restored and reunited when the right time comes.

These four words are the basic foundations of the new order of nations. They speak of God's unfailing love *heseth* or the compassionate love of God and God's covenant of peace, *berit shalom* (Isaiah 54:10; Psalm 89:34). When Israel truly embodies the covenant that will restore the 'peoplehood' of the nations, all nations will treasure God's steadfast love. They will be under God's plan, guidance, protection and unification. Then God's peace and unity will be established as the foundation of the new order of the whole earth. The people will live in peace under the new covenant of love. This peace is permanent and will not be taken away by any force, ever. These four words sum up the meaning of 'arm' or the mighty power of God. Israel bears the four words in her heart, clothes her life in them, and proclaims them among the nations.



*See, the sovereign Lord comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.*

*See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense (compensation)
before him (Isaiah 40:10).*

Torah is best translated as a 'revealed teaching' rather than simply 'law', especially as used by Second Isaiah. It is embedded in Israel's heart and meditated upon day and night. As long as this torah is kept and observed, all nations will be blessed with prosperity and peace. Israel's destiny was to serve God's purpose in magnifying God's torah and making it glorious among the nations. Isaiah is reminded that it is God's plan and purpose to make torah great and glorious (42:21).

*Listen to me, you who know righteousness,
You people who have my teaching in your hearts;*

*Do not fear the reproach of others,
And do not be terrified by their insults. (51:7)*

Mishpat means the judging and saving rule of God for each nation, rather than merely 'justice' or a legal system. This is the message and mission that Israel should proclaim and put into action to all nations. This righteousness or justice is the substance and life force of the new generation for peace and unification. This life force is portrayed in the character of the 'suffering servant' in Isaiah 42:1-4. This servant is the one who is 'upheld', 'chosen' and 'delighted', by God. The servant's ultimate mission is therefore to proclaim and bring forth justice and peace to the nations.

Deliverance (*tsedeq*) connotes powerful purpose, victory, righteousness and a challenging force for a better future. It is like rain from heaven that falls on every person equitably, on the good as well as on the bad. It calls forth the righteousness of right relations and integrity in the community of new nations, and brings forth freedom to the prisoners.

*Your heavens above, rain down righteousness;
Let the clouds shower it down.*

Let the earth open wide,

*Let salvation spring up,
Let righteousness grow with it;*

I, the Lord, have created it. (45:8)

Salvation (*yeshua*) means the new creation of living space and order for meaningful life together. This is a picture of a peaceful

community. It is a *shalom* wanted for all nations. This peace is real for those who wait with hope in the salvation act of God. Israel is the community of this new creation, which springs up in the depths by God's steadfast love and merciful grace.

But Israel will be saved by the Lord

with an everlasting salvation;

*You will never be put to shame or disgraced,
to ages everlasting. (45:17)*

*I am bringing my righteousness near; it is not
far away;*

And my salvation will not be delayed. (46:13)

So, it is the mission and responsibility of the faithful servant of God to make sure that salvation as the new creation reaches the end of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20). We are called and commissioned to carry these four words as foundation pillars of the new society. We are called to preach this good news to distant lands and nations where there is an expectant waiting and hoping for God's rule.

*Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
look at the earth beneath;
the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment
and its inhabitants die like flies.
But my salvation will last forever,
my righteousness will never fail. (Isaiah 51:6)*

Your word, O Lord, is eternal;

it stands firm in the heavens.

Your faithfulness continues through all generations;

you established the earth, and it endures.

(Psalm 119:89-90)

- Pradit Takerngrangsarit

President, Payap University of Thailand

[This reflection is excerpted from morning devotion and Bible study, 10 August 2007 of the International Consultation on "The Role of the Church for Peace and Unification in Korean Peninsula" (The "100th Anniversary Conference of Korean Great Revival 2007"), held in Seoul, Korea.]

The righteousness or justice is the substance and life force of the new generation for peace and unification

Who rules the world?

A biblical reflection on how multinational corporations affect us

The Multinational corporations carry enormous economic power that can even influence governments politically

The world we live in is entrusted to our care by God. It has all the means and resources to provide every person and all nations to live a decent life. Therefore, the gap between the rich and poor and the starvation experienced by more than two-third of humanity not only negates the intention of God's creation as described in the book of Genesis, but also exposes the greed of few. The broken world that we see today is an expression of human sin. The root cause of the desire and craving by humans to accumulate more and more, which in Buddhism is called *tanha*.

Multinational corporations

Capitalism is an embodiment of *tanha* as it encompasses the deceptive power to enslave people into craving for more and more. Multinational corporations are integral component of capitalism that suck profits from poor countries, which makes them power monsters who control and rule the world. These corporations carry enormous economic and political power, which can even influence governments to invade countries and topple

regimes to have access to natural resources and market them. Richard Grossman says in one of his articles,

"We have given corporations dominion over the sustaining of our lives. They have become sovereign citizens and we have become consumers. They concentrate power and wealth. They design and shape our society and world. They carve our goals and aspirations. They shape our thoughts and our language. They create the images and metaphors of our time, with which our children use to define their world and their lives. In other words, what corporations do well, what corporations are designed to be, is the problem."

To have deeper understanding of the power of corporations and the role they play, I share below some statistics which may surprise you.

In 2000 - 2001, only forty-nine of the world's 100 largest economies were countries; other fifty-one were corporations.

Company	Country of origin	Revenue	Economic Comparison
Wal-Mart	US	219,812US\$	Approximate size of Sweden
Exxon Mobil	US	191,581US\$	Larger than Turkey
General Motors	US	177,260US\$	Larger than Denmark
Ford Motors	US	162,412US\$	Larger than Poland
Daimler Chrysler	Germany	149,608US\$	Larger than Norway
Shell Group,	Netherlands/Britain	149.146US\$	same
BP	Britain	148,062US\$	same
Enron	US	138,718US\$	Larger than South Africa
Mitsubishi	Japan	126,629US\$	Larger than Finland
General Electric	US	125,913US\$	Larger than Greece

Source: World Bank- World Development Report 2000

Malaysia was at number 53, larger than Matsushita at 24, but smaller than IBM at 52; Mitsubishi, one of the largest corporations, was at number 22. Total sales of the top 200 transnational corporations were bigger than the combined GDP of 182 countries - of all except the top nine countries. This is about thirty 30% of world GDP. Yet these corporations employed less than 1% of the world's population and even this percentage is shrinking. Normally states are responsible to their citizens, but whom are transnational corporations responsible to? Answer: their shareholders.

Globalisation and Globalism

As capitalism appears in the form of globalisation and invades the entire world, weaker segments of society and nations feel helpless to fight social, political, economic and cultural forces of globalisation. The power and deception of globalisation gives impression that there are no alternatives to capitalist globalisation. However, the overall alternative to capitalist globalisation is use of scientific and technological advancements for the betterment of human life. The whole earth entrusted to our care should be regarded and treated as a physical environment for all human beings. And this should make all of us responsible consumers and producers managing the common good for all.

This can be termed 'globalism'. It is a positive concept and a more humane economic system as compared to capitalistic globalisation, which is imposed on poor nations by powerful financial institutions and their allies. The poor countries are poor, not because they lack natural resources, but because their resources are plundered and taken away by the powerful countries and corporations. This is the cruel and most inhumane nature of heartless globalisation. The majority of people living in the Third World, including some pockets of rich northern hemisphere, experience negative aspects of globalisation. This is the feature of globalisation which is condemned by enlightened Christians for being contrary to the values of Christian ethics. Therefore, it is important to say that globalism is based on collective interdependence of the world and runs counter to collective dependence of the South on the North. This perspective implies that the present form of capitalist globalisation is not inevitable, uncontrollable and irreversible. In other words, one cannot

believe that globalisation glorified by some as the salvation for the world's ills is predestined by God. So as Christians influenced by the value of the kingdom of God, we must work unceasingly towards the realisation of a humane world, which marks true Christian discipleship.

Principalities and powers

Let us take some biblical narratives to understand the reality of brutal powers that dominate the world. And see how some biblical images or passages are used by the powerful to make the poor confined to the status quo and accept poverty and suffering as part of God's will for them. If we try to reread the book of Job, we see the poets questioning the traditional concept of theology, where the victims are always blamed and perpetrators are justified. Is it not true that we are trained in our spiritual formation to vindicate God at any cost? The task of traditional theology has been to carry out this task. In theology this subject is identified as theodicy. In other words, these kinds of theology sustain, nourish and serve the principalities and powers of this age to continue the exploitation and blaming the victims for their own plight.

The writer of the book of Job wants to break away from this dominant theological tradition. Why does the biblical writer bring in the Leviathan motif? Is it just a poetic way of depicting God as victorious king and judge or does it symbolize the coming of the reign of God in a battle against the power of evil



One of the symbols of globalisation

Bible protects us against the deterministic mythological thinking about evil forces which turns people into mere objects of fate

chaos, which is more than the sin of individual human beings? Does it symbolize the spirit of violence and destruction which takes hold of people and societies? Or a chaotic power, which is personified later as Satan?

Is this a way of correcting earlier prophetic texts, including that of Isaiah: 24:4, which makes humans responsible for all misery and suffering and therefore makes everything dependent on repentance? There is no doubt that in many circumstances people are perpetrators of evil. But can all adversity and suffering be attributed to sin alone? This is the debate of Job with his three friends and it is the same question which Habakkuk raises, when experiencing the violence of Babylonian imperialism (Habakkuk.1:2-2:5). It is as if God is ignoring all the bitter and moving questions of Job. What is the point of the discourse of earth, sea, light, rain, stars, lions, wild asses, horses and hawks (Job 38-39) and then in the second round on Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40-41)? Does Job really find sense in this strange answer of God?

Job in his struggle with God is not willing to accept that he is entirely to blame for everything happened to him and God who is omnipotent, is free of blame. In this process of not accepting the entire blame Job realise that his problem is not individual. But this happens to the poor all the time and has become the fate of the poor. They are misappropriated, exploited and driven away into the wilderness, struggling for survival and no divine judge interferes or intervenes (Job 24:1-ff). When in the city the dying, groaning, souls of the wounded cry for help, God pays no attention to their prayers (Job 24:12). The earth is given into their hands and the judges do not function. What the Almighty seems to be doing is frustrating Job; If it is not him, then who is it? (Job 9:24, 9:22, 12:13ff, 12:22). What do we see when God-made chaos made Job and other victims to suffer unjustly? That is the reason Job asked questions such as 'am I a sea monster?' (Job 7:12) and "why don't you fight the powers of chaos instead of me?"

Theological aspects

The rhetorical questions raised by Job may aim at exposing vanity or the illusion of political alliances made by imperial powers to maintain their power. In fact imperial powers have a tendency to think that they are omnipotent and therefore eternal. I believe

Job is questioning the vanity of such thinking and the theology linked to it and advocated by those who come to counsel Job. In other words Job questions the reliance on power to resolve obstacles and problems. In history we see imperial powers, rulers and technocrats afraid of diversity and using dictatorial powers to suppress diversity, plurality, civil liberty and free space.

Job refuses the theology that says that he is suffering because he has sinned and God is with the powerful. In fact Mary in her song (Luke 1:47 ff) exposes this imperial theology when she says, "He has brought down rulers from their thrones...but has lifted up the humble....He has filled the hungry, but has sent the rich away empty". For Mary God is not with the imperial powers and their agents. Rather God is with those weak and vulnerable and the ones who will transform the principalities and powers of this world.

Ultimately, it is the solidarity of people that can have the spiritual and moral power to disarm and dismantle the greed represented by multinational corporations. The hope for the world is in those, who question such powers as Job did and are restless until the world is changed and power is shared to empower the powerless. Job helps us to resist the ideologies and theologies that blame the victim. Such theologies are similar to the dominant economic theories. Unfortunately such theologies, like prosperity theology are becoming popular among church members. It is a Gospel without the cross. The Bible protects us against the deterministic mythological thinking about evil forces which turn people into mere objects of fate. It says that even the most powerless have a choice. They may find themselves in the ecological and social desert land created by chaotic powers of this world. But we can be certain of one thing that God does not abandon those deprived, denied and cast away. As the book of Deuteronomy 32: 10ff says, God will make his people 'suck honey out of the rock'.

—Freddy de Elvis

Passing away of Archbishop Whakahuihui



Archbishop Whakahuihui with his wife Doris

The former Anglican Archbishop of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, Whakahuihui Vercoe, passed away on 12 September 2007 in Rotorua.

He was born in Torere in 1928. After studying at Feilding Agricultural High School, Canterbury University and College House Theological College, he was ordained in 1952. He served as a leader of the Maori arm of the Anglican Church from 1981 to 2004 and was its Primate from 2004-2006. He was elected as a Bishop of Aotearoa in 1980.

New WCC director for interreligious dialogue

He is survived by his wife Doris, three sons and six grandchildren.

The newly appointed WCC director Rev. Dr Shanta Premawardhana is heading the interreligious dialogue and cooperation program from November 2007. Dr Premawardhana is known to the ecumenical family for his achievements in faith-based advocacy and

interfaith dialogue and had been engaged by the WCC to complete its leadership team.

A Baptist pastor in the United States and prior to that in his native Sri Lanka, Rev. Dr Shanta Premawardhana served as the associate general secretary for interfaith relations of the NCCUSA for the past four years. As an

activist in congregation-based community organising and pastor in Chicago for fourteen years, he demonstrated his leadership skills in building bridges across boundaries that divide.

A series of panel discussions Premawardhana organised at the American Academy of Religion emphasise Christian theology's critical engagement

with religious diversity. The WCC's "Thinking Together," which includes the participation of scholars and leaders of other religious traditions, he suggests, is an effective model for such engagement. Convinced that interreligious work must include joint actions for peace with justice, he also advocates for faith-based diplomacy, with religious leaders taking the lead in diplomatic initiatives, particularly in conflicts that are religion-related.

In order to contribute to the promotion of harmonious coexistence and peaceful cooperation in pluralistic societies, the WCC programme on interreligious dialogue and cooperation enables bilateral dialogues, regional and cross-cultural encounters on perceptions of "the other" and on issues such as conversion; engages churches in reflections on what it means to be Christian in a world of many religions; and accompanies and equips the churches for advocacy in countries where religion is at the centre of conflicts. Programmatic work on interreligious dialogue receives guidance from the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA).

ECOT 25th Anniversary Annual meeting ICFLC

The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT), first known as the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT), began in 1982 with a mission to respond to the impact of tourism on communities in the 'developing' world. People on the ground had a different story to tell to that of tourism operators and governments.

Today the global tourism industry has become even more massive, with its outlays being placed at around 10 - 12 percent of global GDP! The challenge of reforming tourism is still there: to incorporate values of justice, genuine development, respect for cultures and ecological sensitivity, and thereby become truly a vehicle for building a human community in the world.

2007 marks the 25th Anniversary of ECOT! An anniversary such as this provides a timely landmark to hold a mirror to the Tourism Industry and assess its performance.

ECOT Anniversary initiatives

'Transforming Tourism / Re-Forming Tourism' will be a 25th Anniversary publication. More than twenty authors from around the world share their experience, insights and concerns regarding the tourism industry as structured today. This publication will of interest to a wide variety of audiences, including churches and faith communities. Copies can be ordered from ECOT.

ECOT Hearing in India: This will be an opportunity for church and other groups and networks to tell their story as to how tourism affects their community.

ECOT Conference in Chiang Mai, 7-8 April 2008: This will precede the meeting of the REO General Secretaries in Chiang Mai. The ECOT gathering will be a forum for representatives of NGOs, aid and development agencies, churches and other faith groups, the tourism industry and governments, academic institutions, and others interested to assess, critique, and point to ways forward for contemporary tourism.

For more details Caesar D'Mello, Executive Director, ECOT can be contacted at caesar@ecotonline.org, or at Tel/Fax +66 (0)53 240 026.



The 27th annual meeting of International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) was held in the Kingdom of Tonga on 22-27 October 2007 hosted by Pacific Conference of Churches and National Council of Churches in Tonga. The theme was 'Living the Jubilee in the Changing and Challenging World'. The CCA Joint Executive Secretary of Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) Moumita Biswas attended the event. The meeting assessed the work of church women in the peace process. There were deliberations on how church women can promote ecumenical movement in countries like East Timor and Nepal. The participants made great emphasis on the need to strengthen ecumenical movement among grassroots women.

CCA-EGY is part of the network promoting the Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC) movement. The movement was started by Shanti Solomon from Church of North India in 1946. Later the movement was promoted by United Presbyterian Church - USA and other church women's organisations. Since 1951, FLC has united women across the world and have supported numerous gender based projects.

New staff at ICFLC

After ten years of serving as the Executive Secretary of ICFLC, Dr Esther Byu is retiring. She says, "Don't just moan for me and my people in my homeland [Myanmar]. Pray, and reflect your faith in your actions while working towards peace. The Church of Christ in Thailand gave me shelter and supported me to promote the FLC move-

ment. Now I feel proud to go back to my homeland and be with my people and their challenges". Byu also served as the executive secretary of CCA-women's concern for eight years.

Cora Tabing Reyes, the former joint executive secretary of CCA-EGY, has recently been appointed as the executive secretary of ICFLC. Cora will be working in the new ICFLC office in the Philippines.

ACTS conference

A group of fifty theology students from Catholic and Protestant seminaries in Asia participated in the Third Asia Conference of

"what is peace and its important" by a group of four young Muslim professionals from Mindanao.

After three days of living and learning together, the group issued a statement with the following commitments: to work for unity amidst diversity; to spread the spirit of oneness to others; to support local and international organisations such as the Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC), Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC), other organisations and CCA in their initiatives for peace and unity, responding to what varied issues God wants theologians to address; maximising the participation of churches and the use of other faith expressions in the pursuit of peace and unity.



Theology Students (ACTS 3) which was held in Davao City, the Philippines from 8-12 October 2007.

The conference included sharing of faith journeys by participants with a focus on "Why I decided to study theology". It included sharing of CCA and Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) ecumenical visions; input by A Wati Longchar on theologising in context of Asia; introduction to Asian feminist theology by Clemens Mendonca; doing Asian feminist theology ecumenically by Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro; the challenge of peacemaking through dialogue in context of Mindanao by Archbishop Fernando Capalla (Catholic) and Bishop Hilario Gomez (United Church of Christ in the Philippines); and a panel on

"Our different denominations did not restrain us to interact with one another. It was a good sign of hope for unity for the glory of God," wrote one participant on the evaluation form.

ACTS is a program jointly organised by the CCA-Faith, Mission and Unity (FMU) and the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Among the fifty theology students, twenty-five came from CCA church-related seminaries and twenty-five from Catholic church-related seminaries in Asia. With the theme, "Doing Theology Ecumenically in Asia Today", ACTS 3 was open to students from the Evangelical Fellowship in Asia. Unfortunately no one could attend this time, however four young Muslim professionals participated in the conference.

Our Consummation

Life beckons us to wonder and humility, to journey into deep reality

To live fore'er within the realm of mystery, forever bound in awful ecstasy.

Apostasy, the doubt that comes as certainty.

We'r seized by dread and vanquished hopelessly.

And we submit to given, fearful history.

This perfect love transforms the wonder that is me.

Life beckons us to freedom and lucidity, to be the self that shapes futurity,

To bear the weight of painful, conscious rhapsody, inventing all that we are doomed to be.

Morality beyond or own integrity, we stand amidst our fate and destiny,

And we must ever, always our own conscious be. That final judgement dreads the wonder that is me.

Life beckons us to service for humanity, to spend our life as solidarity,

To be the burdened one, with man's dark tragedy, this suffering world compels our sympathy.

Humanity, our sole responsibility. The past, the future are for all, we see. And we are called beyond our possibility. The awe-ful gift flows through the wonder that is me.

Mark Thamthai